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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 RPO DUBAI 000269

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SUBJECT: IRAN REGIONAL PRESENCE OFFICE DUBAI: WINDOW ON IRAN - JULY  
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CLASSIFIED BY: Timothy Richardson, Acting Director, Iran  
Regional Presence Office, DOS.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S/NF) Unconfirmed Detention of Dual National American Citizen in Iran: An Iranian-American journalist (please protect) who was covering the presidential election for Tehran Bureau from inside Iran until his credentials were revoked several days ago said he personally witnessed the arrest of a dual U.S.-Iran national during a pro-Mousavi street rally several days before the election. According to the journalist, who described the young man as a friend, he remains in detention despite the fact that the other demonstrators detained at the same time have since been freed. However, it is unclear if the IRIG knows the detained individual is an American. The young man's parents, who are in Iran, believe that publicizing his American citizenship would further imperil their son, given the government's recent attempts to portray the USG as an instigator of the post-election unrest. Comment: The journalist disclosed this information, while refusing to divulge the full name of the person detained, during a conversation about the arrest of Greek journalist Iason Athanasiadis in Iran last week. He argued that Athanasiadis' case was greatly complicated by the public disclosure that he is also a U.K. national.

12. (S) Ahmadinejad's Popularity Falling in the Arab World?: A Syrian journalist who owns a media consultancy firm in Dubai argued the post-election crisis in Iran has made Ahmadinejad vulnerable to criticism in the Arab street. The journalist, a contact of ConGen Dubai's Regional Media Hub, believes the heated debates before the election made it clear to Arabs that this election was about Iran, not the U.S. This distinction provided an unprecedented opportunity for Arab commentators to criticize Ahmadinejad without siding with the U.S. The contact stressed, however, that Ahmadinejad has only lost standing among "moderate" Arabs; he believes that the majority of Arabs hold such strong opinions - whether for or against Ahmadinejad - that recent events have likely not swayed their positions one way or the other. The journalist observed that, in the tradition of the Mahdi, many in the Arab street initially viewed Ahmadinejad as a "benevolent dictator." However, some moderate Arabs now realize that, despite his image in the Arab world as a humble man standing up to the West, Ahmadinejad is resented by many in Iran for mismanagement, incompetence, and corruption. As a result of this very public fall from grace, he argued that Ahmadinejad is no longer the "untouchable, holy figure" in the Arab world he once was.

13. (C) NIOC Executives Reportedly Purged After Election: The purging of reformist-leaning activists and academics has moved to Iran's oil sector, according to an Iranian businessman with close contacts with managers at Iran's National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). Many senior managers at NIOC have been forcibly "retired" since the election, supposedly because they were suspected of harboring sympathy with the opposition. This reported slate of dismissals comes amid the firing of Deputy Oil Minister for Planning Akbar Torkan - a Mousavi supporter - after he publicly questioned the government's oil sector policies in the run-up to the June 12 election. Our contact - who does not believe Mousavi would have won a fair election - speculated that the NIOC "house cleaning" was the government's reaction to widespread post-election rumors that the opposition would call for a strike in Iran's oil sector. Comment: On June 1, Iran's state news agency carried a report quoting NIOC's Director General as saying that Torkan's ability to publicly criticize the Ahmadinejad government without fear of retribution proved that Ahmadinejad was tolerant of his critics. Torkan's removal after the election suggests otherwise. The move also could be a continuation of attempts Ahmadinejad has made in recent years to go after Iran's "oil mafia," a term he frequently uses to refer to Rafsanjani's network in the sector.

14. (S) Iran National Soccer Team Players Quit Voluntarily: A colleague of Team Melli captain Ali Karimi and coach Afshin Ghotbi, who was in Dubai to drop off Karimi's passport for a visa, denied rumors that the players who wore green wristbands during the June 17 match with South Korea have been forced off the team. He said that the players faced limited professional opportunities in Iran, and therefore chose to retire in order to pursue opportunities with teams abroad. According to the contact, the Iran Football Federation (IFF) has not taken any disciplinary action against the players, and they are all still in possession of their passports. In fact, two of the players -

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Mehdi Mahdavia and Vahid Hashemian - have already traveled to Europe without any incident. However, he said he suspects the IFF may choose to quietly punish the players once tensions in Iran cool down. He also alleged that the IFF asked FIFA to take disciplinary action against the Team Melli players, but FIFA refused the request because it violated rules against political interference. According to the contact, Coach Afshin Ghotbi, an American citizen, is not in trouble and will likely continue to coach Team Melli. Comment: This account contradicts media reports suggesting the players were forcibly retired, had their passports confiscated, and were banned from travel. Although it is clear that Ali Karimi's passport was not confiscated, we will not know if he is able to leave the country until he tries to travel to Los Angeles in the coming days. These events do corroborate other reports IRPO has received about the politicization of soccer under Ahmadinejad. Several contacts have told us that Team Melli is always accompanied abroad by government security officials; and it was reportedly a security minder who ordered the players to remove the wristbands at half-time. Despite Ahmadinejad's best efforts to capitalize on Team Melli, participants in the recent demonstrations carried placards the words "Iran's champions" emblazoned over a photograph of the players wearing "Mousavi green. "

15. (S) Expediency Council Researcher Describes Drafting of 5-Year Development Plan: A researcher in the Expediency Council's Center for Strategic Research (CSR) who was in Dubai to get a visa explained the CSR's role in drafting the 5-Year Development Plan. The researcher works in the agriculture section in the economics branch of the CSR; he and 16 other researchers/experts were responsible for drafting the "vision" for the development plan's parts related to agriculture. The vision, he said, includes production, investment, and

construction goals. Their contribution, combined with the plans from other sections at the CSR, were then debated by the full Expediency Council and forwarded to the Supreme Leader for his approval. The Ahmadinejad administration is now responsible for drafting the details of the plan and afterwards it will be sent to the Majles for approval. The researcher discounted the notion that Ahmadinejad might balk at the Expediency Council's vision because the President had representatives in attendance during the Expediency Council's debate about the plan and he said the version approved by the Supreme Leader had everyone's support. The agriculture section, and the CSR more generally, is also responsible for reviewing the government's performance relative to Development Plan benchmarks; these reports are also provided to the Supreme Leader. He also described the structure of the CSR, explaining that the CSR has 5 branches focusing on the Economy, International Relations, New Technology such as biotechnology and nanotechnology, Energy, and Social Welfare. Within the Economic branch, which he knew more about, there are departments for Agriculture, Planning, Microeconomics, and Investment. The agricultural department has recently been focusing on food security and irrigations projects. Comment: The Expediency Council's role, per the constitution, is to arbitrate disputes between the Guardians Council and the Majles and provide guidance to the Supreme Leader. The CSR's hand in formulating the development plan indicates that the EC proactively interprets its mandate to provide guidance and has broader involvement in formulating the government's strategic direction than the constitution implies.

16. (C) Visa Applicants Comment on Post-Election Unrest: Iranian visa applicants in Dubai have generally expressed frustration with the outcome of the election. Many student applicants, in particular, have complained about the results, and alleged cheating, but few have been active participants in the demonstrations against the regime. Several students from Tehran University said that although they support the protesters, they do not want to participate in the demonstrations due to the risk of getting killed. Comments: The pool of visa applicants drawn to Dubai is largely made up of the westernized northern Tehran elite; a cohort that should theoretically be most aggrieved and offended at the outcome of the election. The applicants in Dubai, however, have not been at the forefront of the demonstrations. Even the students, between preparing for their final exams or coming to Dubai for their visa interviews, seem to have had other things to do and avoided the demonstrations. The collective sense from the applicants is one of resignation. Notable comments:

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- A visa applicant working for MTN Irancell, a quasi-government-owned mobile phone provider, said the company received an order from the government the day before the election instructing them to cut phone-based text messaging services on election day. Per press reporting, the messaging service remains off.

- A student from Tabriz said that many people there are upset with the outcome of the election and that the city largely supported Mousavi in the election. When asked why Tabriz has remained quieter than Tehran, he said the heavy presence of the riot police on the city's streets dissuaded many from joining protests. The student, who is not Azeri himself, said that only Mousavi was capable of leading the opposition movement, but at the same time said the opposition is not about Mousavi himself, it's about seeking change and opening Iran to the West.

- A student from Tehran University said she had not participated

in the demonstrations because she was busy preparing for and taking her end-of-year exams. The student explained that the exams were not uniformly delayed but that each school's faculty decided whether to delay the exams. Her department - she is an anthropology student - is not located near the areas of greater unrest, and as a result, provided students the option of delaying their exams or taking them on time. She said some students delayed solely to participate in the demonstrations; others, like herself, took their exams on time.

- Another student from Tehran University said the protests and demonstrations were useful because they showed the world that Iranians are not all "terrorists." However, he did not think the protests would force changes in the government any time soon.  
RICHARDSON